

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8184
INFO AMEMBASSY LAPAZ
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUITO 3108

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT-PINT, EC
SUBJECT: RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA NAMED LIBERAL CANDIDATE

REF: QUITO 2979;

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: AS GENERALLY EXPECTED, THE LIBERAL PARTY SUPREME COUNCIL NAMED RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA RENDON THAT PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE MAY 9. CHOSEN AS HIS RUNNING MATE WAS LONG-TIME PARTY ACTIVIST ARSENIO VIVANCO. THE NOD TO HUERTA RENDON CAME AFTER THE PARTY'S FIRST CANDIDATE, FRANCISCO HUERTA MONTALVO, ADOPTED A CONCILIATORY ATTITUDE IN THE COUNCIL. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM BELIEVES THAT HUERTA RENDON WILL BE A STRONGER CANDIDATE THAN HUERTA MONTALVO AND WILL BE ASSURED OF A RUNOFF BERTH AGAINST SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN FOLLOWING THE JULY ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, WE PERCEIVE HIS CANDIDACY AS HAVING SEVERAL SIGNIFICANT WEAKNESSES WHICH MAY REDUCE HIS CHANCES. END SUMMARY.

2. AS WIDELY RUMORED, THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF THE LIVERAL PARTY MOVED TO NAME RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA RENDON AS THE
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PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE TO REPLACE HIS NOW DISQUALIFIED NEPHEW, FRANCISCO (PANCO) HUERTA MONTALVO. THE RATHER GRIM MAY 8 MEETING IN QUITO WAS PRESIDED OVER BY FRANCISCO HUERTA, IN HIS CAPACITY AS NATIONAL DIRECTOR. ALTHOUGH THE YOUNG HUERTA ABSTAINED ON THE FINAL VOTE, HE ADOPTED AN EVENHANDED POSE RATHER THAN USE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS UNCLE'S CONVERSATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT TO FIGHT HIS NOMINATION.

IN SPITE OF THE YOUNGER HUERTA'S ATTITUDE, WHICH DOUBTLESS DERIVES FROM HIS WISH NOT TO DIVIDE HIS PARTY, THE SESSION OF THE JUNTA WAS TENSION FILLED. ALTHOUGH A UNANIMITY OF VOTES MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED TO SHOW PARTY UNITY, THERE WERE THREE OPPOSING VOTES, AND TWO ABSTENTIONS OF THE 15 MEMBERS. ONE MEMBER LEFT THE SESSION BECAUSE THE JUNTA REFUSED TO EXPEL THOSE MEMBERS OF THE PARTY WHO HAD CONSPIRED AGAINST THE HUERTA MONTALVO CANDIDACY. HE ACCUSED HUERTA RENDON AS BEING AN ACCOMPLICE TO THOSE SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS.

3. THE SUPREME COUNCIL HAD PREVIOUSLY MET ON MAY 5 WHEN HUERTA MONTALVO AND BLASCO PENAHERRERA HAD STALKED OUT OF THE MEETING IN PORTEST OVER A MOVE TO NOMINATE HUERTA RENDON DURING THE SAME SESSION AS THE HUERTA MONTALVO/ PENAHERRERA TICKET WAS BEING FORMALLY WITHDRAWN. AS A PEACE OFFERING, THE COUNCIL BOWED TO HUERTA MONTALVO'S MINIMUM DEMANDS THAT A PURE LIBERAL TICKET BE NAMED TO REPLACE HIM, THAT PENAHERRERA BE OFFERED THE VICE-PRESIDENCY, THAT FORMAL COOPERATION WITH OTHER POLITICAL GROUPS BE REJECTED, THAT HUERTA MONTALVO BE APPOINTED CAMPAIGN CHIEF, AND THAT HUERTA MONTALVO BE APPOINTED CAMPAIGN CHIEF, AND THAT HUERTA RENDON ADHERE STRICTLY TO THE DECISIONS OF THE SUPREME COUNCIL. IN VIEW OF HUERTA RENDON'S SUSPECTED BEHIND THE SCENES PLANNING WITH CARLOS JULIO AND OTTO AROSEMENA, ET. AL., PLUS
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HIS RUMORED DEALINGS REGARDING A NON-LIBERAL SERRANO AS HIS RUNNING MATE TO GIVE HIS CANDIDACY A BROADER BASE, THERE HAD BEEN SOME DOUBT WHETHER HUERTA RENDON WOULD ACCEPT THE CONDITIONS. IN THE EVENT, PENAHERRERA INDIGNANTLY REFUSED THE VICE-PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION CITING THE BESMIRCHING OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, AND HUERTA RENDON ACQUIESCED IN THE OTHER POINTS.

4. FOLLOWING THE HUERTA RENDON NOMINATION, THE SUPREME COUNCIL RECOMMENDED FORMER PARTY NATIONAL DIRECTOR PEDRO JOSE ARTETA AND QUITO BUSINESSMAN ARSENIO VIVANCO (BOTH MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL) FOR HUERTA RENDON TO SELECT FROM. HE CHOSE VIVANCO AND THE COUNCIL APPROVED HIM, BUT AGAIN NOT UNANIMOUSLY.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 QUITO 3108

5. HUERTA RENDON, 63, HAS A LONG HISTORY OF LIBERAL PARTY
ACTIVITY. HE WAS THEIR STANDARD BEARER IN 1956, WHEN HE
WAS NARROWLY DEFEATED BY THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN CAMILO PONCE.
IN 1967 HE MADE AN EFFORT TO BE NAMED INTERIM PRESIDENT,
BUT WAS BEATEN OUT BY OTTO AROSEMENA.

6. ARSENIO VIVANCO NEIRA IS A LAWYER BY TRAINING AND
THE OWNER OF A CHAIN OF RETAIL STORES IN QUITO. HE HAS BEEN
A LIBERAL DEPUTY AND SENATOR AND PRESIENT OF THE
LIBERALS' PICHINCHA DIRECTORATE. HE IS A MEMBER OF
THE COUNCIL OF ADVISORS OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY.
REPRESENTING QUITO'S MONEYED AND INFLUENTIAL RETAILERS,
HE IS VERY CONSERVATIVE POLITICALLY.

7. COMMENT: IT IS THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM THAT HUERTA
RENDON WILL BE A MUCH STRONGER CANDIDATE THAN HIS
NEPHEW AND WILL BEAT HIS RIVALS ON THE SO-CALLED CENTER-LEFT,
JAIME ROLDOS OF CFP AND RODRIGO BORJA OF DEMOCRATIC LEFT,
FOR A RUN-OFF SPOT AGAINST SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN. IF SO,
HE WOULD BE FAVORED TO DEFEAT DURAN-BALLEN IN THE SECOND
ROUND AS THE HEIR OF THE LION'S SHARE OF THE FOLDOS AND BORJA
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VOTES. IN HIS FAVOR, HE HAS A WELL-KNOWN NAME, THE ENDORSEMENT
OF THE SECOND LARGEST PARTY (AFTER THE CFP), THE ENTHUSIASTIC
SUPPORT OF MOST OF THE GUAYAQUIL OLIGARCHY, AND WHAT
APPEARS TO BE THE SUPPORT OF IMPORTANT GOE ELEMENTS.
PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, GIVEN HIS PRESUMED ACCESS TO
SIZEABLE AMOUNTS OF CAMPAIGN FUNDS, HE WILL BE THE ONLY CANDIDATE
WHO WILL BE ABLE TO COMPETE IN CAMPAIGN SPENDING WITH

DURAN-BALLEN.

8. HOWEVER, HUERTA RENDON HAS SULLIED HIS REPUTATION BY HIS ACTIONS AND INACTIONS DURING THE EVENTS WHICH BROUGHT DOWN HIS NEPHEW. SIGNIFICANT ELEMENTS OF PARTY HAVE BEEN EMBITTERED BY HIS CONTRIBUTION TO PANSHO'S DOWNFALL AND AS A RESULT, THE LIBERAL PARTY MAY BE ENTIRELY UNITED BEHIND HIM. MOREOVER, IN PANCHO'S ATTEMPTS TO SALVAGE SOME PERSONAL AND PARTY DIGNITY FROM THE DEBACLE OF HIS CANDIDACY, HUERTA RENDON HAS BEEN DENIED THE OPPORTUNITY TO BROADEN HIS ELECTORAL BASE BY FORMING A FORMAL COALITION WITH SMALLER, BUT PERHAPS CRUCIAL POLITICAL GROUPS. GIVEN THESE MINUS FACTORS, HUERTA RENDON MAY FIND HIMSELF IN A GENUINE HORSE RACE WITH ROLDOS AND BORJA. CAMPAIGN STUMPING IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS AND THE RESULTS OF ECUADOR'S STILL RUDIMENTARY POLLS MAY PROVIDE A BETTER INSIGHT INTO HIS PROSPECTS.

9. PITY OF IT IS THAT HYERTA RENDON COULD HAVE HAD THE CANDIDACY FOR THE ASKING AS THE CAMPAIGN BEGAN, WITH AN EXCELLENT CHANCE OF VICTORY AS THE CANDIDATE OF A BROAD BASED NATIONAL CONTITUTIONALIST FRONT. ALTHOUGH HIS PROSPECTS STILL MUST BE CONSIDERED GOOD, HIS VACILLATION, FOLLOWED BY ONE ABORTED EFFORT FOR THE CANDIDACY IN MARCH AFTER HIS NEPHEW HAD ALREADY BEEN NOMINATED AND NOW BY HIS CONSPIRACY WITH THE GOE, HAS SERVED TO DAMAGE HIS PARTY'S UNITY, TARNISH HIS IMAGE AS AN HONORABLE POLITICIAN
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AND TO REDUCE HIS POSSIBILITIES FOR ELECTION AND AN UNCOMPROMISED PRESIDENCY.
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